CLAIMS

We claim:

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- 1. A method of diagnosing individuals at risk for a disease state comprising
 a) determining the distribution of Rad51 foci in a first tissue type of a first individual; and
- b) comparing said distribution to the distribution of Rad51 foci from a second normal tissue type from said first individual or a second unaffected individual; wherein a difference in said distributions indicates that the first individual is at risk for a disease state which results in aberrant Rad51 loci.
- 10 2. A method according to claim 1 wherein said disease state is cancer.
 - 3. A method of diagnosing individuals at risk for cancer comprising
 a) determining the distribution of Rad 1 foci in a potential cancerous tissue

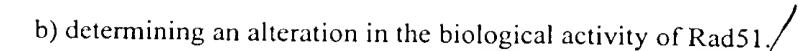
type of a first individual; and

- b) comparing said distribution to the distribution of Rad51 foci from a second normal tissue type from said first individual or a second unaffected individual; wherein a difference in said distributions indicates that the first individual is at risk for a cancer which results in aberrant Rad51 loci.
 - 4. A method according to claim 3 wherein the cancer is selected from breast cancer and skin cancer.
- 5. A method of diagnosing individuals at risk for a disease state associated with apoptosis, said method comprising
 - a) determining the distribution of Rad51 foci in a first tissue type of a first individual; and
- b) comparing said distribution to the distribution of Rad51 foci from a second normal tissue type from said first individual or a second unaffected individual; wherein a difference in said distributions indicates that the first individual is at risk for a disease state associated with apoptosis which results in aberrant Rad51 loci.

- 6. A method according to claim 1 wherein the extent of aberrent distribution indicates the severity of the disease state.
- 7. A method according to claim 1 wherein said distribution is determined through the use of polyclonal antibodies.
- 8. A method according to claim 1 wherein said distribution is determined through the use of monoclonal antibodies.
 - 9. A method according to claim 7 or 8 wherein said antibodies are raised against eukaryotic Rad51.
- 10. A method according to claim 9 wherein said eukaryotic Rad51 is mammalian Rad51.
 - 11. A method for identifying an apoptotic cell comprising
 - a) determining the distribution of Rad51 foci in a first cell; and
 - b) comparing said distribution to the/distribution of Rad51 foci from a second non-apoptotic cell;
- wherein a difference in said distributions indicates that the first cell is apoptotic.
 - 12. A method according to claim 11 wherein said distribution is the association of Rad51 with DNA fibers.
 - 13. A method according to claim 11 wherein said distribution is the association of Rad51 into micronuclei.
- 20 14. A method for identifying a cell under stress associated with nucleic acid modification comprising
 - a) determining the distribution of Rad51 foci in a first cell; and
 - b) comparing said distribution to the distribution of Rad51 foci from a second non-affected cell;

wherein a difference in said distributions indicates that the first cell is under stress associated with nucleic acid modification.

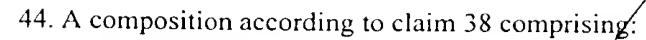
- 15. A method according to claim 14 wherein said stress is oxidative or hypoxic stress.
- 5 16. A method according to claim 14 wherein said stress is heat shock.
 - 17. A method according to claim 14 wherein said stress is cold shock.
 - 18. A method for identifying a cell containing a mutant Rad51 gene comprising determining the sequence of all or part of at least one of the endogenous Rad51 genes.
- 19. A method of identifying the Rad51 genotype of an individual comprising determining all or part of the sequence of at least one Rad51 gene of said individual.
 - 20. A method according to claim 18 or 19 further comprising comparing the sequence of said Rad51 gene to a known Rad51 gene.
- 21. A method according to claim 20 wherein a difference in the sequence between the Rad51 gene of said individual and said known Rad51 gene is indicative of a disease state or a propensity for a disease state.
 - 22. A method for screening for a bioactive agent capable of binding to Rad51 comprising:
 - a) adding a candidate bioactive agent to a sample of Rad51; and
- b) determining the binding of said candidate agent to said Rad51.
 - 23. A method for screening for a bioactive agent capable of modulating the activity of Rad51, said method comprising the steps of:
 - a) adding a candidate bioactive agent to a sample of Rad51; and



- 24. A method according to claim 23 wherein said biological activity is DNA dependent ATPase activity.
- 25. A method according to claim 23 wherein said biological activity is nucleic acid strand exchange.
 - 26. A method according to claim 23 wherein said biological activity is DNA binding.
 - 27. A method according to claim 23 wherein said biological activity is filament formation.
- 10 28. A method according to claim 23 wherein said biological activity is DNA pairing.
 - 29. A method for screening for a bioactive agent capable of modulating the activity of Rad51, said method comprising the steps of
 - a) adding a candidate bioactive agent to a call; and
 - b) determining the effect on the formation or distribution of Rad51 foci in said cell.
 - 30. A method according to claim 25 further comprising subjecting said cell to conditions which induce nucleic acid damage.
 - 31. A method of inducing apoptosis in a cell comprising increasing the activity of Rad51 in said cell.
- 32. A method according to claim 31 wherein said increasing comprises overexpression of endogenous Rad51.

- 33. A method according to claim 31 wherein said increasing comprises administration of a gene encoding Rad51.
- 34. A method according to claim 31 wherein said increasing comprises administration of Rad51 protein.
- 5 35. A method according to claim 31 wherein said cell is a cancer cell.
 - 36. A method according to claim 31 further comprising subjecting said cell to conditions which induce nucleic acid damage.
 - 37. A method according to claim 36 wherein said conditions comprise the administration of a chemical agent which causes nucleic acid damage.
- 38. A method according to claim 36 wherein said conditions comprise subjecting said cell to radiation.
 - 39. A method according to claim 31 further comprising increasing the activity of p53 in said cell.
 - 40. A composition comprising:
- a) nucleic acid encoding a R/ad51 protein; and
 - b) nucleic acid encoding a tumor suppressor protein.
 - 41. A composition according to claim 38 wherein said tumor suppressor protein is p53.
- 42. A composition according to claim 38 wherein said tumor suppressor protein is BRCA1.
 - 43. A composition according to claim 38 wherein said tumor suppressor protein is BRCA2.

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- a) nucleic acid encoding a Rad51 protein;
- b) nucleic acid encoding a BRCA1 protein;
- c) nucleic acid encoding a BRCA2 protein; and
- d) nucleic acid encoding a p53 protein.

45. A composition comprising:

- a) a recombinant Rad51 protein; and
- b) a recombinant tumor suppressor protein.
- 46. A kit for detecting the distribution of Rad51 foci in a cell or tissue comprising:
- a) binding agent for Rad51 foci; and
 - b) a detectable label.

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